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Salvador to get new envoy.

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Army medics

President Reagan, amid denials that U.S. involvement is escalating, yesterday named a new ambassador to El Salvador and announced that a battalion-level Army medical unit will be dispatched to San Salvador to treat civilian and military combat casualties and to train Salvadoran medical personnel.

The White House said Reagan

will nominate Thomas R. Pickering, 51, a career Foreign Service officer now serving as U.S. ambassador to Nigeria, to the same post in El Salvador, replacing Deane R. Hinton, who has had the job since 1981.

Pickering's new assignment also was announced by Secretary of State George P. Shultz at a State Department news conference in which he praised Thomas O. Enders, who is expected to be replaced as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs by

Langhorne "Tony" Motley, ambassador to Brazil.

Soon after Pickering's appointment was announced, criticism came from some conservative circles on Capitol Hill, where one source said: "If they want to lose the war, let's the guy."

Cited was Pickering's lack of experience in Latin America, along with his involvement in earlier administrations in disarmament and nuclear-test ban negotiations resulting in treaties opposed by

many conservative groups. There was no indication last night on whether confirmation of Pickering's appointment will be fought in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or on the Senate floor.

Pickering becomes the nominee for the El Salvador post with something of a cloud over his head as a result of an apparent Soviet attempt to discredit him with the Nigerian government.

As The Washington Times reported in a series on Soviet forg-

eries on May 25, Pickering was alleged in a bogus memo from a U.S. Information Agency employee to be aware of a supposed CIA assassination operation against Obafemi Awolowo, head of the Nigerian opposition Unity Party, and M.K.O. Abioja, a leading business and political figure in Nigeria.

State Department officials have linked this memo to the Soviet disinformation campaign but the Nigerian government has formally declined to accept the U.S. explanation and has appointed a special tribunal to investigate the matter.

The Pickering appointment came as reports of new Reagan administration activity concerning El Salvador were made public through the day at the White House, State Department and Pentagon.

An administration official told The Washington Times that the recent change in guerrilla tactics to assassination and execution of both American and El Salvadoran government soldiers is aimed directly at unsettling the U.S. public.

"They are extremely well acquainted with American public opinion," the source said. "We think they are trying very hard to draw the Vietnam analogy."

The U.S. Army also said that more than 100 Green Berets stationed at Fort Bragg will travel to Honduras this month and start a counterinsurgency training program there for about 2,500 Salvadoran soldiers.

Maj. John Meyers, an Army spokesman at the Pentagon, said a 1,100-man Salvadoran rapid-reaction battalion will start training in mid-June.

The battalion will be followed by four Salvadoran light infantry units of about 350 men each. Meyers said the Fort Bragg troops also will train a Honduran battalion of undetermined size.

At the daily White House news briefing, Deputy Press Secretary Larry Speakes said the El Salvador transfer of the medical unit, which numbers 20 to 25 doctors, nurses and technicians, "in no way conflicts with our self-imposed commitment to hold the number of (U.S.) military trainers (in El Salvador) to 55." The current number is 52, he said.

Reagan, as he was leaving the White House to spend several days at Camp David, told reporters the medical unit was being assigned to El Salvador because, "There is a real need for medical care down there."

Asked about "those who will say that this is a stepping up of our involvement" in El Salvador, Reagan responded, "Well, if they say it, they will be as wrong as they've been on so many other things."

"I heard some time ago about their problems there," the president said. "This is for civilian as well as military casualties. There is a great need for it, and I am doing this in consultation with the Congress."

Speakes later said that the medical unit, about one-third of which are physicians, will leave for El Salvador "shortly" and will work "under the policy direction of the U.S. Embassy" in San Salvador for about six months. Unit members are not expected to leave the city and will not go to combat zones, he said, as they "help alleviate a bad situation which is getting worse."

"The medical situation in the country is critical," Speakes said, noting that Salvadoran hospital facilities are overcrowded and that the country has a shortage of medical equipment and trained personnel. Speakes said the administration also is considering an emergency package of medical and health services for El Salvador, using funds of the Agency for International Development.

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